

Crime Prevention Tips for the Disabled

Disabled persons face many physical challenges. This could make them vulnerable to would-be assailants who assume the disabled are incapable of protecting themselves. If you are a disabled person, or know someone who is, the following information may be helpful. Take your time to read and remember these tips. You may be able to prevent yourself or a friend from becoming a victim of a crime.

General Crime Prevention Tips

- § Know and avoid situations and locations that could invite crime, i.e., dark alleys, unlit parking lots, etc.
- § Decide what you plan to do in the event you are confronted, i.e., show confidence, scream, etc.
- § Consider your options in these situations and practice your responses often, so that you can recall them in a real situation.

Home Security Tips

- § Consider having a peephole installed in your doors. Make sure you have the proper locks on doors and windows and use them while you are at home as well as when you are out.
- § Never open the door for

a stranger. Always demand verification of the stranger's identity and the purpose of the visit.

- § Never tell a stranger calling by phone that you are alone or that you are disabled.

- § Plan an avenue of escape from each room in your residence to use in case of emergency, such as a break-in or a disaster.

Consumer Protection Tips

- § Always ask for identification from all solicitors and call their agency for verification.

- § Don't commit yourself to purchases or charitable donations over the phone. Ask the caller to mail the information to you so you can make an informed decision. If you are not familiar with the company or organization, consult the State Department of Consumer Affairs or the Better Business Bureau.

- § Be sure to read and understand all contracts before you sign them.

If your sight is impaired, have someone you trust read the entire document to you.

- § Beware of anyone who is offering products or services at a "once in a lifetime" offer.

§ Consider having your checks mailed directly to your bank to avoid mail theft or robbery.

Travel Safety

§ Whenever possible, travel with someone you know. There is safety in numbers.

§ Leave word of your plans with family or friends — including your ultimate destination and estimated time of return.

§ When waiting for a bus, train, etc., wait in a centralized location near other passengers.

§ Keep your handbags and packages on your lap instead of on the floor or on the seat next to you.

§ Consider using traveler's checks instead of carrying cash.

§ Be aware of those around you, particularly when exiting a bus or train.

§ If you have a speech or hearing impairment, always carry a card of communication symbols.

If You Become a Victim of a Crime...

Get help immediately by calling:

- the police or sheriff
- a doctor
- a friend
- a relative

Try to remember as many details about the assailant as possible, such as clothing, hair color, identifiable marks, etc.

Be certain not to destroy any possible evidence!

Source: Crime and Violence Prevention Center, California Attorney General's Office

CRIME PREVENTION FOR PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

A physical disability—impaired vision, hearing, or mobility—doesn't prevent you from being a victim of crime.

Common sense actions can reduce your risk.

§ Stay alert and tuned-in to your surroundings, whether on the street, in an office building or shopping mall, driving or waiting for the bus or subway.

§ Send a message that you're calm, confident and know where you're going.

§ Be realistic about your limitations. Avoid places or situations that put you at risk.

§ Know the neighborhood where you live and work. Check out the locations of police and fire stations, public telephones, hospitals, restaurants or stores that are open and accessible.

§ Avoid establishing predictable activity patterns. Most of us have daily

routines, but never varying them may increase your vulnerability to crime.

At Home

§ Put good locks on all your doors. Police recommend double-cylinder, deadbolt locks, but make sure you can easily use the locks you install.

§ Install peepholes on front and back doors at your eye level. This is especially important if you use a wheelchair.

§ Get to know your neighbors. Watchful neighbors, who look out for you as well as themselves, are a frontline defense against crime.

§ If you have difficulty speaking, have a friend record a message—giving your name, address, and type of disability to use in emergencies. Keep the tape in a recorder next to your phone.

§ Ask your police department to conduct a free home security survey to help identify your individual needs.

Out and About

§ If possible, go with a friend.

§ Stick to well-lighted, well-traveled streets. Avoid shortcuts through vacant lots, wooded areas, parking lots or alleys.

§ Let someone know where you are going and when you expect to return.

§ Carry a purse close to your body, not dangling by the straps. Put a wallet in an inside coat or front pants pocket. If you use a wheelchair, keep your purse or wallet tucked snugly between you and the inside of the chair.

§ If you use a knapsack, make sure it is securely shut.

§ Always carry your medical information in case of an emergency.

§ Consider keeping a cellular phone or installing a CB radio in your vehicle.

On Public Transportation

§ Use well-lighted, busy stops. Stay near other passengers.

§ Stay alert. Don't doze or daydream.

§ If someone harasses you, make a loud noise or say "Leave me alone." If that doesn't work, hit the emergency signal on the bus or train.

Take a Stand!

§ Join, or help organize, a Neighborhood Watch group. Make sure their meetings are accessible to people with disabilities. For example, do they need a sign language interpreter? Can individuals who use walkers, crutches or wheelchairs enter the meeting place?

§ Work with local law enforcement to improve responses to all victims or witnesses of crime. (Role-play how people with disabilities can handle threatening situations.)

§ Work with a rehabilitation center or advocacy groups to offer a presentation to schools and other community organizations on the needs and concerns of individuals with disabilities.